National Association for Sport and Physical Education
an association of the American Alliance for Health, Physical Education, Recreation and Dance

NASPE Sets the Standard

POSITION STATEMENT

Recess for Elementary School Students

It is the position of the National Association for Sport and Physical Education (NASPE) that all elementary school children should be provided with at least one daily period of recess of at least 20 minutes in length.

Recess is an essential component of a comprehensive school physical activity program and of the total education experience for elementary school students. Various organizations including the United States Department of Health and Human Services and the United States Department of Education (USDHHS & USDE, 2000), Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC, 1997), National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC, 1998), and American Association for the Child's Right to Play (IPA/USA, n.d.) support school recess as an integral component of a child's physical, social, and academic development.

Recess provides children with discretionary time to engage in physical activity that helps them develop healthy bodies and enjoyment of movement. It also allows children the opportunity to practice life skills such as cooperation, taking turns, following rules, sharing, communication, negotiation, problem solving, and conflict resolution. Furthermore, participation in physical activity may improve attention, focus, behavior, and learning in the classroom (California Department of Education, 2005; Hannaford, 1995; Jarrett, 1998; Jensen, 2000; Shephard, 1997; Symons, Cinelli, James, & Groff, 1997).

Currently 16 percent of our nation's children are overweight—a result of poor nutritional habits and a lack of physical activity (Hedley, et al., 2004). An increasing number of children are developing cardiovascular risk factors (e.g., high blood pressure) and type 2 diabetes (Kaufman, 2002). Daily physical activity is an important part of the solution to these health issues. National recommendations state that school-aged children and youth should participate in at least 60 minutes per day of moderate to vigorous physical activity (NASPE, 2004; Strong, et al., 2005; USDHHS & USDA, 2005). Participation in a regularly scheduled recess period can make an important contribution toward meeting this recommendation. In addition, extended periods of inactivity (two hours or more) are discouraged for elementary-age children (NASPE, 2004).

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Recess for Elementary School Students *(cont.)*

NASPE recommends that:

- All children in elementary schools should engage in at least one daily period of recess for at least 20 minutes per period.
- Recess does not replace physical education classes. Physical education provides sequential instruction to enhance the development of motor skills, movement concepts, and physical fitness. Recess provides unstructured play opportunities that allow children to engage in physical activity.
- Recess is not viewed as a reward but as a necessary educational support component for all children. Therefore, students should not be denied recess so they can complete class work or as a means of punishment.
- Adequate and safe spaces and facilities are provided for all students to be physically active at the same time. Outdoor spaces are used whenever the weather allows.
- Adequate, safe, and developmentally appropriate equipment is provided for students to engage in enjoyable physical activity.
- Physical education and classroom teachers teach children positive personal and social skills (e.g., cooperation, conflict resolution) for use during recess.
- Safety rules are taught and enforced.
- Recess is properly supervised by qualified adults.
- Bullying or aggressive behavior is not tolerated.
- Adults intervene when a child's physical or emotional safety is an issue.
- Recess is not scheduled immediately before or after physical education class.
- Recess does not interfere with physical education classes that are taking place in a common environment.

Quality physical education and daily recess are components of the elementary school educational experience that enable students to develop physical competence, health-related fitness, personal and social responsibility, and enjoyment of physical activity so that they will be physically active for a lifetime.

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